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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PE](#)  
SUBJECT: NARCO-TERRORISM CAUSING NATIONAL DEBATE IN PERU

REF: A. REF A:LIMA 3646  
[1](#)B. REF B: LIMA 3707

Classified By: NAS Director Susan Keogh. Reasons 1.4(d)

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: The growing threat of narco-terrorism, reflected in the brutal attacks in Ocobamba and Tajyacaja (Ref A), has sparked a public debate featuring demands that the Government take decisive action to tackle "liberated" zones. A factor complicating security operations has been confusion about whether the police or military have the lead, at a time when terrorism and narco-trafficking have increasingly merged into a single "narco-terrorist" threat. One noted analyst has made the case that the new narco-threat is much greater than Sendero Luminoso (SL) alone ever was. However the police-military riddle gets resolved, the debate shows Peruvians increasingly recognize that no-go zones represent a threat to national security. In para 5 below is a brief description of the diverse groups involved in Peru's narco-terrorist network, many of them young, fueled by poverty and lured into illegal activities by the promise of escape. Government security forces have received additional budget support to address this challenge, but probably not enough; likewise, their existing plans, lacking execution, may be unequal to the task. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In recent days, media comments and statements by government officials, triggered by the recent brutal attacks on police in Ocobamba and Tayacaja, have raised questions about the nature of the security threat in the emergency zones. Some believe the attacks suggest that Sendero Luminoso may be resurging. Others say the problem is muddier, and consists of ex-army combatants, ronderos (civil defense units), narco-cocaleros, and assorted others all participating in drug mafia violence.

[1](#)3. (C) The rub is that the identity of the perpetrators determines which security force has authority to respond, with the military taking the lead on terrorism and the Peruvian National Police (PNP) on counter-narcotics. This arbitrary-seeming division is deeply entrenched, and has resulted in both sides pointing fingers at the other. It may also have shaped public perceptions concerning the government's lack of will to address the problem. A recent national poll by IPSOS/APOYO shows 78 percent of Peruvians think the GOP is doing "little or nothing" to fight narco-terrorists. Notwithstanding recent security successes against SL leader "Comrade JL" in the Huallaga Valley (Ref B), public skepticism remains high over the perceived lack of broader progress, particularly in tackling Sendero in the

Apurimac and Ene Valleys (VRAE).

¶4. (SBU) Former Minister of Interior and noted security analyst Fernando Rospigliosi has made the case that narco-trafficking is a national emergency "more dangerous than Sendero ever was." In his view, terrorism had political ideas that could be fought and defeated, whereas drug-trafficking has generated money and violence with unstoppable corruptive power. Rospigliosi does not believe Sendero is growing, but believes that it has morphed into hired killers for narco-traffickers. Defense Minister Wagner has responded that the PNP should take the lead role against narco-trafficking, but supports joint patrolling with the Army in intelligence-based operations. Lack of personnel and 70,000 sq km of mountainous terrain in the VRAE complicate the Army's task of capturing the SL leadership. He reiterated a promise made in the past - that the state would be reinforcing its presence in the VRAE with more Army bases and Police stations.

¶5. (SBU) Illustratively, at a recent meeting, Prime Minister Jorge del Castillo offered a catchall definition of who was involved in the Tayacaja attack: "Subversion, linked with common crime and narco-trafficking, with the possibility of a violent resurgence of Sendero Luminoso." Below is more detail on the different groups who are -- either peripherally or directly -- involved in the narco-terrorism network in the VRAE. The information below is based on credible reports from Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) field personnel, police intelligence and NGO sources, who work in the VRAE and have paid close attention to the growth of narco-related violence.

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¶A. Sendero Remnants  
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PNP sources estimate 350-400 Sendero remnants continue to operate in the VRAE, with a military structure based in the remote highlands of Vizcatan, (Northern Ayacucho). The PNP believes 5 SL columns operate under the command of Comrade Alipio (Quispe). Drug mafias pay SL to protect mule-trains bringing drugs out of the Apurimac River Valley. Services are paid in dollars, which SL uses to obtain weapons, buy supplies, and pay members. SL elements also seize weapons during ambushes such as the December 2005 attack on a PNP convoy out of Palma Pampa. Senderistas still disseminate ideological propaganda, assemble campesinos for indoctrination, and give out flags, as well as act as hired assassins for the drug industry. Increasingly, however, SL acts as a narco-mafia, with its own cocaine production enterprise, (in the view of many observers, including the Minister of Defense in one newspaper interview) following the path of the FARC and potentially headed for a takeover of the lucrative narcotics business in the VRAE. (Septel we will seek to answer more broadly the question: "What does Sendero Luminoso (SL) mean today?")

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¶B. Ex-Army  
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After the Ocobamba attack, unconfirmed local media reports claimed that the perpetrators were ex-Army. Paramilitary clothing is usually worn during ambushes on the police or army: attackers steal uniforms along with arms. In August, a Pichari Army NCO was captured by the PNP with 9,000 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition stolen from the base. When soldiers have completed voluntary service, having learned tactics and weapons use, but having earned little money, they are often drawn into the narco-trafficking network. A VRAE Army commander reported to NAS seeing ex-soldiers who admitted they were protecting drug routes, acting as drug couriers ("mochileros"), and working in rustic laboratories. The Army has tended to adopt a non-interference strategy with cocalero farmers, said the same commander, to erode support the SL might have among the local population (i.e. eliminating coca will push growers onto the side of Sendero).

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¶C. Narco-cocaleros  
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Cocaleros selling leaf to drug middlemen - acopiadores, - who come to the door and also collect coca paste for shipment by drug organizations, are relatively a thing of the past. Recent interdiction operations by DIRANDRO drug police at Palma Pampa have uncovered a surge in small rustic laboratories inside houses. Other cocalero groups rent larger equipped laboratories to drug producers. Mochileros are paid an average of 30 USD per kilo to transport cocaine base for journeys averaging 3 days to a specific location where they are replaced by pack animals or vehicles with armed guards. Mochileros are often robbed and killed. DIRANDRO commanders have noted an increase in the presence of Mexican and Colombian drug cartels in the region since the first part of 2007, working alongside Peruvian drug groups.

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¶D. Civil Defense Units/Ronderos  
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Ronderos (Comite de Auto Defensa or CAD) were established under President Fujimori to combat Sendero Luminoso. They are organized, armed and controlled by the Army. Although the GOP prohibits the issue of automatic weapons, NAS personnel have seen, on at least one occasion, CAD formations carrying FAL 7.62mm automatic rifles during a visit to Pichari Army base. Ronderos also purchase automatic weapons with money from drug traffickers. Entire communities of cocaleros are encouraged to cooperate with/join the Ronda. Local sources estimate 40 CAD committees, with 40-60 men, operate in the Apurimac/Ene Valley. Ronderos are occasionally involved in drug trafficking, and have used their arms against police forces during interdiction operations. CAD equipment, including weapons, radios and clothing, were captured by DIRANDRO during a cocaine lab interdiction in Llohegua in October.

¶6. (SBU) The population of the VRAE is largely young, poor and unemployed. The disaffected gravitate towards narco-trafficking as a source of income and activity. A local Army commander told NAS that narco-terrorist groups recruit from remote communities in the VRAE, preferring teenagers lured by the promise of pay. The recent police operation against Sendero in Aucayacu, (Huanaco) revealed that "Comrade JL" was accompanied by a group of adolescents, rather than a group of hardened terrorists. November 29, Huanuco Regional President Jorge Espinoza publicly called for government initiatives to counter SL ideological inroads with local youth on the margins of society.

¶7. (SBU) The Government of Peru has stepped forward with justifications for budgetary initiatives. On November 21, the Interior and Defense Ministers presented a joint request to Congress for 400 million soles (133 million USD) of increased funding to fight narco-terrorism in the Apurimac and Ene Valleys. (Note: The Armed Forces mainly want money to buy arms and refurbish bases. The Police particularly need ammunition, as well as arms and other equipment. End Note). Minister of Economy Carranza authorized a supplement of only 50 million soles (16 million USD). The head of the Peruvian Joint Command, Adm. Montoya, announced that the Ministry of Defense would construct 5 new anti-subversive bases in the VRAE to add to the 18 already in the area. The Minister of Interior also announced construction of new police bases in the VRAE and Huallaga.

¶8. (C) Comment: If one goal of narco-terrorists is to undermine public confidence in the security of the country, they have made some progress judging by the IPSOS/APOYO poll. While the recent attacks on police have caused the usual polemics against corruption and incompetence on the part of the government, there is a deeper undercurrent of concern that narco-terrorism presents a serious menace to governability in Peru. Most people concur that the VRAE is a no-go zone, too dangerous to attempt eradication and development projects. Although Minister Wagner continues to support the concept of joint operations, to date, Plan VRAE and other plans to improve social and economic conditions in the area appear to be stymied by the lack of an executable security plan. While interdiction operations continue out of

the PNP base at Palma Pampa and joint PNP-EP operations have been occurring around the eradication operations in the Upper Huallaga, to date, no joint Police-Army CNT operations are being conducted in the VRAE. Additionally, Police representatives have told us that the Armed Forces and PNP do not share intelligence they have collected on SL in the Emergency Zones, indicating a lack of mutual trust.

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